

**Natural Resources Advisory Board
October 26, 2015
Meeting Minutes**

NRAB Members:

Jerry Hiller	Scott Bryant	Matt Langendorf
Marcia Polhamus	Darel Martin	Aaron Kuehl
Mike Kepple	Joseph Mark	Charlie Potter

IDNR Staff:

Director Rosenthal	Jim Herkert	Mark Alessi
Stan McTaggart	Randy Smith	Paul Shelton
Chris Young	Bob Appleman	Tami Evans

Guests:

Dave Freeman	Jim Scheer	Rich Scheer
Kevin Chapman	Carrie Alms	Elaine Hopkins

Vice Chairwoman Marcia Polhamus called the meeting at 4:00 p.m. Roll call was given, introductions were made; quorum was met.

Adoption of the October 26, 2015 Agenda - Matt Langendorf motioned to accept the October 26, 2015 agenda; Aaron Kuehl provided the second.

Adoption of the July 27, 2015 meeting minutes – Mike Kepple motioned to adopt the July 27, 2015 meeting minutes; Scott Bryant provided the second.

Upland Game - Stan McTaggart – Stan is IDNR's Ag/Grassland Program Manager and provided the board with a power point presentation https://dnr.portal.illinois.gov/teams/directors/Communications/NRAB_2015_Final.pptx and a brief update of upland game in Illinois. Habitat in Illinois for upland game has been in rapid decline over the last 10 years.

Last year, there were 11,000 hunters with only 55,000 quail harvested. In the 1960's/1970's 250,000 hunters harvested one million pheasants; last year, 16,000 hunters harvested 41,000 birds. Grassland birds have also declined. Based on research, three reasons for the decline are habitat, habitat, habitat; modern agriculture, invasive species and recreational mowing.

IDNR is focusing on pheasant habitat areas in east central Illinois and hopes to put more habitat teams on the ground. 20,000 acres have currently been enrolled in State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement, Conservation Reserve Program for the Grand Prairie Natural Division and the Southern Till Plain with a focus on pheasant, quail and grassland birds. An additional 10,000 acres had been applied for but only 2,000 acres were received. IDNR is waiting for the next opportunity to apply.

A pilot program with the Office of Land Management to emphasize and provide better upland game management within the ag leases on state properties that are set aside for wildlife is in place. IDNR continues to work with its partners capturing federal funds to implement programs reaching common

goals. The Natural History Survey tracks the success of the SAFE program and it shows that management does work for upland game.

Darel asked if the department has noticed a decline due to predators. Stan indicated that the decline is related to good habitat; with enough good habitat upland game can handle natural predators.

Charlie asked if the department had ever done predator test blocks of equal habitat. No – scale becomes an issue.

Mike stated that something needs to be done; the department needs a stronger position on increasing upland game and suggested raising the habitat stamp from \$5.00 to \$10.00. Aaron added that Pheasants Forever has talked about this issue and believes that this could be the year to move forward.

Scott asked if there was a way to work with the CORPS on the timing of mowing of the levies. Stan stated that DNR is all for delayed mowing. Scott offered to help work with the CORP on this issue.

Mike asked if there was any talk of netting wild bobwhites, tagging them and releasing them where there is good habitat. It's really about good habitat; if you have good habitat you'll have the birds.

Deer Management – Paul Shelton - Paul was asked to join the meeting to answer questions from Board Member Mike Kepple. Mike stated the hottest topic he is confronted with is deer management and asked that Paul educate him on what basis the deer are being managed.

In 2008 the Joint Task Force on Deer Population was created by House Joint Resolution 65. HJR65 was created to look at deer management and make recommendations for change. The task force met over a period of months, held public meetings and then made a number of recommendations to the General Assembly. The overwhelming feeling was there were too many deer in Illinois and not enough being done to control it.

The Task Force recommendations were broad. The most significant was that IDNR look at the historical deer vehicle collision data collected annually by the Illinois Department of Transportation and adopt this data as the standard by which the deer population could be gauged. The Task Force recommended looking at deer vehicle accident rates between 1994 and 2007, pick a number that was more or less the median of what had happened during that period of time, look at both the highest and lowest values of deer vehicle collisions that occurred and select a point in between for a statewide goal. The result was setting a statewide target for the reduction of about 14%; this procedure was followed for each county. If a county had been flat, there was no change. If a county had declined it would increase, and if a county had been increasing rapidly, there could be a significant reduction.

Mike asked if a county falls below the benchmark does the department reduce the number of permits. Paul stated that various measures are looked at to reduce hunting pressure and try to stabilize those counties around goals. Director Rosenthal added that most are taken out of the late season.

Mike stated that he heard that if DNR closes a late season those permits are put back into the regular season which does not reduce permits. Paul said that's not true. The peak number of permits issued during the firearm season happened in 2009 and overall permit numbers have been declining since. The number of counties that have been included in the late winter season have also dropped dramatically.

Darel asked if a county is closed during the late winter season, is there an increase of antlerless harvest. The primary harvest during late winter season is not accomplished through permits sold for the late winter season. The General Assembly passed legislation to allow anyone with left over firearm or muzzleloader permits the opportunity to use those permits in a county that is open in the late winter season. That had an impact on hunter behavior as now firearm season permits valid for seven days could now potentially be valid for 14 days. Many hunters focus their efforts on buck hunting early knowing that they could try to accomplish antlerless harvest later.

Darel asked if there was a correlation with the harvest increase in counties for the youth season with the counties that had been closed that could have resulted in more deer for the kids to harvest. Paul indicated that it's possible but those permit numbers are unregulated; any youth can get a permit to hunt. Youth permits have steadily increased but they are a very small part of the overall harvest.

Mike asked who was on the Deer Task Force. Paul stated that there were 15 members, chaired by Director Sam Flood. They include: Representative's Dan Reitz, Jim Sacia, David Reis, and Bob Flider. Senator's John Sullivan, Gary Forby and Gary Dahl. Jim Riemer appointed by the Senate Minority Leader, Jason Sherman, Conservation Police Officer, Larry Trent, Director of the Illinois State Police, Jerry Beverlin, United Bowhunters of Illinois, Jim McFarland, Illinois Federation of Outdoor Resources, Kevin Martin, Illinois Insurance Association and Henry Carlisle Illinois Farm Bureau.

Mike asked if these were recommendations or an agreement. Recommendations.

Did the department ever publically say these recommendations were binding? No, but they agreed to the recommendation of how to set the goals. Some of the recommendations were never implemented; overall they were clearly not binding. Mike stated that he has been told that IDNR publicly stated that this was a binding agreement. The department needs to be transparent and educate the public on how it's managing the deer population. There are a lot of people that don't believe IDNR is transparent, or understand the process and believe that the Farm Bureau is managing the deer. Director Rosenthal added that they have input just like a lot of other people.

Paul added that House Joint Resolution 65 was passed by the legislature; unanimously. The General Assembly overwhelmingly believed there were too many deer, not the Farm Bureau.

Mark Alessi stated that the department is working on a new website that will help inform the public about the regulatory and administrative processes. The goal is to contact hunters for input and help finish a site that they want to see.

Matt asked if the increase in speed limit has shown an increase in deer auto collisions. DNR did an analysis but it only had the potential of a minor impact.

Scott added that disease has been a problem and that there is a concern with farmers and crop loss. We need to work together, fix the problem, stop the finger pointing and name calling and get back to having a quality deer herd population. The public doesn't trust the IDNR, and we need to help fix this.

Mark Alessi added that the survey sample taken around the state indicates that the majority of constituents do trust the department. Scott stated that he doesn't agree with the sampling process and that the public does view trust differently.

Mike stated, so that he understands, IDNR manages the population by county, based on deer vehicle accidents, and that each county has a threshold and when that threshold hits, permits are reduced.

Paul stated that even after establishing the goals in 2008 there were still counties above goal that the department has not been able to bring down. Mike asked about the 50% reduction in Pike County. Pike County has been reduced below goal and there has been a reduction in permits. The argument is that permits were reduced but the county was not removed from the late winter season. In most counties the late winter season is not a huge contributor. Pike County is a very big contributor in the late winter season and many outfitters rely on the season for management. Pike remains the biggest deer county in the state and is the biggest source of nuisance deer permits. Mike stated that the nuisance permits come from farmers who are always going to say the deer are eating all the corn.

Mark stated that there is a process in place to confirm whether it's deer, turkey, raccoon, etc., when complaints are received. Certain criteria must be met before permits are issued. Mike asked if permits are tracked and if they are in the numbers. Yes, but they are not in the harvest numbers. The department produces a report on how many nuisance permits are issued and how many deer are taken.

Mike reiterated that the department needs to educate the public and be transparent. Mike added that this is an advisory board – I'm telling you what's out there. There's a problem.

Aaron asked if using deer vehicle collisions as a metric was a competent method. It seems to be a very robust index of what is going on. Aaron added that that would help in our message should be communicated as a valid method to track deer.

Charlie stated that as a new director there is an opportunity to communicate to its stakeholders. The sportsmen of Illinois look at the current Governor as an avid sportsman and believe that things are going to get better because they believe he is one of them. There is a general lack of trust in the department, despite what the survey says. The dialogue could change by being proactive and by explaining what the state is doing in a social media format.

Mike asked who the stakeholders are that want more deer killed. Paul said attitudes fluctuate. We've been aggressive with deer harvest until 1995. We are at a level that most people would agree that the population is ok or too low. So there is no one out there saying there are too many? No. Scott disagrees and believes that the Farm Bureau would tell you differently. Mike agreed and stated that he hopes the Farm Bureau is not managing the deer.

Marcia asked about the youth and crossbow usage. Paul stated that youth have the option of using a crossbow throughout the entirety of the season as long they have youth hunting license, not a regular hunting license.

What about lowering the weight on the compound bow? Can we put this on a future agenda?

Waterfowl – Randy Smith – Randy provided the board with handouts and a power point presentation of the 2016-2020 Waterfowl Hunting Seasons.

<https://dnr.portal.illinois.gov/teams/directors/Communications/2015WaterfowlZoneLinePublicMeetings.pdf>

The department operates within the framework that the US Fish & Wildlife gives us. The USF&W allows states to change its waterfowl zone lines & split season options every 5 years. The zones that are set must be contiguous and readily identifiable on a road map. The zone setting process varies amongst states; Illinois prefers 4 zones. Setting season dates every five years allows for any necessary changes based on data and trends. If season dates are changed annually, they are typically changed due to the previous year's freeze.

Illinois has been recognized for having the most public involvement in the waterfowl process.

Jerry Hiller asked what the criteria are for setting the 4th zone; every opening is Thanksgiving Day. The majority of hunters, through waterfowl survey's and public meetings wanted a late opening. Randy explained that when seasons are set as late as possible within the federal framework it becomes the last Sunday in February; 60 days prior puts you at Thanksgiving Day. In some years, because of the calendar shift it can be the following Thursday, which is the opening of 2nd shotgun deer season.

Proposals are due to the USF&W December 1 in order to be implemented for 2016.

The proposal process starts a year in advance. Public meetings were held in Alton, Carbondale and Bloomington, discussions were held with waterfowl constituency groups throughout the state, district wildlife biologists and waterfowl site managers on opinions and recommendations and comments were received on the department's website. All discussions are taken into accountability in making changes/proposals.

Essentially, things are unchanged. In Northeastern Illinois, often referred to as the 5th zone, is an area where there is a north duck zone and central goose zone. One of the most important things to our hunters is that duck and goose season align. The proposal is to have the north zone line follow Interstate 80 and be the division between the central and north zone. This eliminates confusion and standardizes duck and goose season dates on both sides of the line.

Season dates were also essentially unchanged in most areas.

Randy went through the duck and goose season date proposals for the north, south, central and south central zones. Teal and Early Canada Geese were included in these proposals; they will be enrolled in the 5 year process. <https://dnr.portal.illinois.gov/teams/directors/Communications/NRAB%20-%20Oct%202015%20-%20Waterfowl%20DatesLines%202016-2020.pdf>

Charlie Potter stated, with all due respect, he can't believe this conversation. This revolves around two things: the south central zone opening date and the moving of the north zone line. The south central zone line was created to enable the public hunters of Illinois a place to duck hunt un-impacted by the commercial hunting interest that took over the south zone. Opening the season in the south central zone after the public holiday, when there is high chance of a freeze up and three weeks later in the central zone is not the deal we made with the USF&W or to the hunters who wanted that zone. The department is listening to hunter surveys that aren't done in a manner that are statistically relevant and providing less opportunity to hunters by making the seasons later. This does not represent the best interest of the Governor or the state.

The northern zone line was changed to alleviate problems in that specific region. There are four people that hold ducks and provide all the hunting opportunity for that area. No one else is affected and they are being disenfranchised.

Scott added that the public waterfowler's at Carlyle want to hunt late and are happy with a later opening.

Mike said that he could not support these proposals; Charlie agreed.

Discussion ensued regarding season dates, the zone line change, freeze up, hunter satisfaction, etc.

Mike made a motion, based on history and negotiations that have gone into this, to not approve the zone line proposal. Leave the line the way it is now not what is proposed. He added that as a board, we serve at the request of the governor and on behalf of the governor and suggested that the director ensure that the Governor sees and approves any recommendation. Charlie seconded the proposal. Roll call was given for a voice vote; motion passed, no opposition was heard.

Aaron commented that, in general, he supports simplified rules and commended staff for the effort that has gone into this.

Matt stated that this will be the last time he votes on a topic before department experts have finished their presentation. They were interrupted and should have been heard before a decision was made. Marcia agreed.

Charlie motioned to change the waterfowl season dates for the south central zone to the Saturday as close to the November 5; Mike provided the second. Roll call was given for a voice vote; motion passed, no opposition was heard.

2016 NRAB Dates – Director Rosenthal – Director Rosenthal would like to host a meeting at his place February 8th. Additional information will follow. Future dates for the board will be sent around to the members in the near future. Mike Kepple suggested holding meetings throughout our state parks.

Public Comments – Karrie Alms – Public Comments – Karrie Alms – Karrie is from Peoria and would like to talk about conservation stewardship and the land conversion process. The statute under which the department is organized includes outdoor recreation & facilities and includes the expressing of policies for proper dissemination of and enforcement of the various laws pertinent to the conservation program of Illinois and the nation.

The Land & Water Conservation Fund was enacted by the National Park Service in 1965. This was established to provide a fee from offshore drilling which provides states money for outdoor recreation purposes.

In 1981, the City of Peoria applied for an LWCF grant; one for acquisition and one for development. In an effort to safeguard LWCF acquisitions and developments, Karrie is recommending four actions: Practical Alternatives to Development, Mandatory Conservation Real Estate Deed Restriction, Mandatory identification of all LWCF parcels when included within a TIF district and Sanctioning of LWCF recipient's to become ineligible for future LWCF grants for poor stewardship and non-compliance with regulations.

These recommendations stem from the City of Peoria developing a 38 acre parcel at Riverfront Park for housing purposes. Some members of the community feel that this does not meet the needs of the public for outdoor recreational development and is not a legitimate conversion of land.

Karrie is advocating that the Department raise its performance standards and review its procedures on how LWCF conversions are handled. Bob Appleman stated that the Department follows the guidelines set forth by the National Park Service on LWCF acquisition conversions. The federal act establishes a process for conversion of property but there are requirements. DNR is just an objective, in-state liaison; the National Park Service makes the final determination. The Department agreed to review its process.

Karrie provided the board a packet of information relative to her presentation.

<https://dnr.portal.illinois.gov/teams/directors/Communications/Conservation%20Stewardship%20Presentation%20NRAB%20Karrie%20Alms%20October%202015.pdf>

Charlie asked if the department allowed professional staff to travel for meetings and asked if they paid for those travel expenses if deemed appropriate. He noted that an IDNR staff member attended a professional association meeting out of country but paid for it out of his pocket. The director responded that there isn't a budget, however, all staff are given the opportunity to travel if deemed necessary and relative to their job circumstance, but they first must put their request in.

Aaron commented that he appreciated all the work that the staff has done with the information and presentations they have provided to the board.

The director added that the department is working on CPO issues, a plan for SPARTA and the Museums.

At 6:55 p.m. Mike Kepple motioned to adjourn; Scott provided the second.